



News Release from Congressman

ROB SIMMONS

SECOND DISTRICT, CONNECTICUT

WWW.HOUSE.GOV/SIMMONS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TUESDAY, JUNE 20, 2006

CONTACT: JOHN GOODWIN

202/225-2076

BRIEFING TELLS SIMMONS MORE ACTION IS NEEDED TO PROTECT VETS' PERSONAL DATA

*Simmons Reiterates Call For Legislation That Requires VA To Provide Free Credit Reports and Monitoring;
Implementation of Security Measures*

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Following a congressional briefing sponsored by the House Armed Services Committee on the potential compromise of personal information by the U.S. Dept. Veterans Affairs (VA), Congressman Rob Simmons, R-2nd District, today reiterated the need for legislation that will require the VA to provide free credit reports and credit monitoring to each of the 26.5 million veterans affected by the May 3 theft of electronic data.

"Today's briefing did nothing to assuage my concerns about the mishandling of sensitive, personal data of 26.5 million veterans," Simmons said. "All Veterans entrust our government to safeguard our most personal information, yet the VA failed to offer these most basic protections."

Data stolen from the VA includes information on military personnel and their families. Today's briefing by the Armed Service Committee sought to examine the privacy information flow between the Dept. of Defense (DoD) and the VA. Participating in the hearing was Mr. Tom Harvey - Assistant Secretary for Congressional Affairs (VA); Mr. Ron Aument - Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits (VA); and Mrs. Jeanne Fites - Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Program Integration (DoD).

In May, Simmons joined Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) and introduced H.R. 5464, the "Veterans' Identity Protection Act of 2006." H.R. 5464 would require the VA to:

- Provide a free credit report every three months over a one year time frame to every veteran whose personal data was compromised;
- Provide one year of free credit monitoring to every veteran whose personal data was compromised;
- Implementation by Jan. 2007 the recommendations made by the Inspector General of Veterans Affairs in their March 2005 Audit of the VA Information Security Program. Should this not occur, funding for the Office of the Secretary would be decreased by 10 percent for every year they are not instituted.

The Simmons-Blackburn legislation comes on the heels of Simmons' letter to three of the nation's major credit reporting agencies asking for assistance. Simmons asked that the companies provide a free credit report to each of the 26.5 million veterans affected by Monday's announcement. Simmons also asked the three credit giants to offer fraud alert and credit monitoring services to those veterans who request it.

Simmons concluded, "Now, more than ever, Congress needs to pass legislation to strengthen the VA's information procedures. We must also assist those who may have been adversely affected by the recent theft of data by requiring free credit checks and require more stringent security procedures for handling sensitive personal data. Our government should be protecting personal information and cracking down on identity theft, not enabling it."

###